

## **The students' reflective writing manifestation of reader-response literary analysis**

**R. Bunga Febriani**

English Department, Galuh University Ciamis,  
Indonesia

Email: [bunga.febriani@gmail.com](mailto:bunga.febriani@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

*This article presents reflective writing manifestation in Reader-response literary analysis. The article is aimed at finding out how the reflective writing is manifested in the students' Reader-response of literary analysis. The writer carried out the study by analyzing the students' portfolio documents of their reflective essays responding to three literary works. Fourteen students enrolling Literary Criticism Subject at a private university in West Java took part in the present research. Literary Criticism subject was chosen as the object of the current study, considering that the students in enrolling the subject were not merely introduced to literature, but also were led to be able to evaluate, describe, and analyze literary works. The study revealed some findings. Firstly, Reader-response prompts were helpful in giving aids to the students that they give the students idea how to write down their ideas and thoughts in minds. However, as the second finding, most students tend to keep their focus on the feeling section. Some of them were proven to be more critical by questioning things happened in the stories, yet they still had no idea how to analyze and evaluate the questions they had. The last finding, the writer noticed that none of the students relate their reflective essays to relevant literature to support their opinion. The writer considered that this occurred due to their lack of knowledge and practice of critical thinking and critical writing.*

**Keywords:** *Reader-response, Reflective writing*

Received:  
8 August 2018

Revised:  
19 February 2019

Accepted:  
28 February 2019

Published:  
28 February 2019

### **INTRODUCTION**

Teaching English Literature to the English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners may contribute to some benefits. Collie and Slater (1990) asserted that literature is beneficial in the language learning process. That literature provides valuable authentic materials is one of the main reasons to use literature in the language classroom. Other reasons include that literature provides cultural enrichment, language enrichment, and personal involvement. These reasons of using literature to language students are echoed by Lazar (1993) who believed that using literature in the language

classroom is beneficial, considering that it is (1) motivating, (2) providing access to cultural background, (3) encouraging language acquisition, (4) expanding the students' language awareness, (5) developing the students' interpretative abilities, and (6) stimulating the students' imagination so that they can develop their critical abilities and increase their emotional awareness. Briefly speaking, using literature for EFL learners is considered a promising tool for language learning purposes (Khatib, 2011).

Literary works as valuable authentic materials, as Collie and Slater (1990) described it, offer plenty of written material which are important, since they convey fundamental human issues. The works are not aimed at specific purpose of teaching language. Having to read literary works, the EFL students should be able to read and think critically about the given works. Speaking as a teacher of literary subjects, the writer (the teacher) does not intend to explain about what is in a literary work or beliefs or judgments contained in them. The writer would like the students to discover things and feelings by themselves.

However, when the students are done with the reading of literary works, it does not mean that they stop until that point. When they are reading, they need to interact with the works. In order to express their critical thinking, such as ideas, opinion, evaluation, they need a kind of medium to convey their transaction with the literary works. Here, an approach to literary analysis takes place. The approach is called Reader-response.

Some of the reasons of using literature in teaching EFL students are related to developing the students' ability to improve their skills of interpretation of literary works and thinking critically upon the literary works they are reading. This kind of critical thinking include their abilities to give opinion, ideas, thoughts, and judgments about the literary works. In the attempt of achieving such purposes, the writer found that one kind of academic writing, named reflective writing, is considered suitable that it can accommodate the students' interpretation upon literary works. In this sense, teaching literature to the EFL students is not merely assigning the students to read, but they are also obliged to write down their reflection upon the literary works.

The present study is aimed at investigating the manifestation of reflective writing in the students' Reader Response literary analysis. Reflective writing and reader-response in a sense share a common purpose of encouraging the readers to read and think critically and later to write critically. For this purpose, the present study is carried out to seek answer to the following research question:

**Research question:**

How is reflective writing manifested in the students' Reader Response of literary analysis?

**Research objective:**

To investigate how reflective writing is manifested in the students' Reader Response of literary analysis.

### **Reader-response: An approach to literary analysis**

Reader-response theory is rooted from transactional theory suggested by Rosenblatt (1988). In her work entitled *Writing and Reading Transactional Theory* (1988), she explained that reading and writing share a necessary involvement with text. Writing and reading is distinguished that a writer starts with a blank page and must produce a text, and a reader starts with already-written or printed text and must produce meaning. Similar to the reading and writing analogy, the term Transaction, as she explained, is used to explain the relationships in which each element conditions and is conditioned by the other in a mutually constituted situations. The reading transaction means that very reading act is a transaction involving a particular reader and a particular text in a particular context.

In accordance to Rosenblatt's theory, Iskhak (2015) stated that reader-response theory offers reading-writing integration activities. He asserted that studies on the application of reader-response theory indicate the significance of the approach to classroom practices of literary teaching. Herlina (2016), echoed the theory of Rosenblatt stating that there are processes involved in understanding literature, so that the teaching of literature paradigm shifted from transmission to transactional which reveals reciprocal relationship between the reader and the text.

Margaret (unknown year of publication) O'Mara defines reader response as a critical essay that tells the reader what a book means to the reader. The critical essay reflects a close reading of the work. It also contains specific examples drawn from the work and provides the reader's well-considered opinion of the work's strengths and/or shortcomings. Thus, it demonstrates that a reader has read a book/work, internalized and contextualized its arguments and can articulate his/her reactions to it.

Anonymous authors (2012) described that "Likes" and "dislikes" are important markers in Reader-response theory. It recognizes the fact that readers respond to literature on an emotional level and that such responses are important to understand the works. The authors emphasized that reader-response critics focus on the reader, thus the reader is the most important element in the reading process.

In the context of teaching literature to English as Foreign Language (EFL) students, many researchers had carried out research that implemented the use of Reader-response approach to literary analysis as an output to be accomplished in literature classes. Harfitt and Chu (2011) carried out a research that shared their experiences of using poems in teacher-training courses where the students were second-language learners. By conducting the research, the writers wanted that the student teachers did not merely give a lecture on theories and beliefs, yet to see how reader's response could highlight the creative role of a reader. Another research was conducted by Garzon and Pena (2015). They presented the pedagogical implementation of the reader-response theory in an EFL classroom with language pre-service teachers as they were assigned to read two short stories. The study revealed that the application of task-based on the reader-response theory had encouraged a meaning seeking process along with the development of high order thinking skill in the future language teachers

### **Reflective writing**

Using Reader-response approach when teaching literature to EFL students requires the students to be able to think critically towards the works they are reading. Also, they are encouraged to speak up their opinion, judgment, enjoyment, and evaluation about the works. One of the ways of stating the students' thoughts is to manifest them in the form of written work, such as reflective essays.

Before going into an explanation of reflective writing, the writer believes that it is more proper to begin the discussion with a definition of reflection. Reflection, as a process of everyday life, is a kind of thinking related with deep thoughts which is purposed to achieve better understanding of something. Reflection involves one examining his feelings about an experience. This insight is supported by Learning and Information Services (2012) which defined reflection as a "way of enabling self-development and deeper learning by looking back at an experience so as to learn from it and then move forward".

A reader of literary works is expected to be able to think reflectively. Reflecting on an experience, in this case reflecting on literary works, helps a reader to make connections between theory and practice, and between his/her past and present knowledge. Reflection enables self-development and deeper learning since it allows the readers to look back at an experience manifested in literary works and therefore they can learn from it and move forward. Reflective writing embraces the reflection into the more structured format of a written account and links it to academic theory.

Learning and Information Services (2012) stated that reflective writing gives an opportunity to the reader to gain further insights from a work through deeper reflection on his experiences. The reader can also gain further consideration of other perspectives from people and theory. Reflective writing is a realization, or proof, of reflective thinking and/or critical thinking. Reflective thinking involves some actions. The first of all is to look back at something. It can be something that happened, or an idea, or an object. Secondly is to analyze the event or the idea. This may involve thinking in depth and from different perspectives and explaining with reference or theory. The last but not the least, thinking carefully about what the event or the idea means to the reader is also a part of reflective thinking. Echoing this view, Ross (2011) stated that reflective writing activities have the potential to improve the quality of student writing, that it increases the quality and the quality of the student writing practice.

Reflective writing is a kind of academic writing. However, it is more personal than the other kinds of academic writing. The writer uses the first person pronoun (I) to describe his/her experience and feelings. In writing reflection journals or essays, there is a model that is commonly used as a guidance called Gibb's Reflective Circle. Considering the students are new to writing reflection, Gibbs (1988) developed a reflective circle. The reflective circle is useful since has clearly defined sections, consisting of Description, Feelings, Evaluation, Analysis, Conclusion, and Action Plan. In *description* section, a reader writer simply briefly describes the event. In *feelings* section, a reader writer is given an opportunity to explore any thoughts or feelings they have upon the event. The *evaluation* section gives a reader writer to explore what is

good or bad about the event. In the *analysis* section, a reader writer makes sense of the event. This section should be the largest section in a reflection, since it takes all the issues that have been highlighted previously. Also, it is important to relate to relevant academic literature in order to be able to make sense of the event. In the *Conclusion* section, the reader writer brings all the previous sections all together so that he can draw conclusion from examining the event and consulting the relevant literature. In the last but not the least section, the reader writer takes into account the previous elements of the cycle and suggests a plan for similar events that may happen in the future.

## **METHOD**

At the English Department of Universitas Galuh Ciamis, Literary subjects are among those subjects taught to the students. There are actually three subjects belong to literary subjects, namely Introduction to Literature, Literary Criticism, and Literature for Language Education. The first literary subject aims at introducing the students to literary genres and at exposing them to reading literary works, such as poems, short stories, novels, and drama. The second literary subject introduces literary analysis to the students and acknowledges to them the approaches to literary criticism. The last literary subject is to give the students insights of using literature in the language classroom; the subjects teach how to implement the kinds of teaching methods by using literature.

Discussing the manifestation of reflective writing in the students' Reader-response of literary analysis in the present study, the writer employs qualitative research design. Qualitative method emphasizes on describing a particular activity, situation, field, behavior of people in-depth and a detailed way, as described by Fraenkel and Wallen, (2012). The present research focuses on the manifestation of reflective writing in the students' reader response of literary works. Therefore, document analysis is used as the qualitative research design, by using the students' reflective essays as the instrument to seek for how the students manifest their thoughts using Reader-response literary analysis in the form of reflective writing. Portfolio records the students' response of the given literary works. The portfolio consisted of the students' reader response of two short stories and a novel. The short stories and the novel belonged to the genre of Prose in literature. Two short stories given to read by the students are entitled "*The Story of an Hour*" by Kate Chopin and "*Misery*" by Anton Chekhov. The Novel assigned to the students is entitled "*Lord of the Flies*" by William Golding.

The present study attempts to analyzed the manifestation of reflective writing in Reader-response literary analysis. This student artifacts analysis

Each student' portfolio consisted of three essays responding to three literary works.

## **Participants:**

Fourteen students enrolling Literary Criticism Subject at the English Department of Universitas Galuh Ciamis took part in the present research. They were the students of the 5<sup>th</sup> semester. Literary Criticism subject was chosen as the object of the current study, considering that the students in

enrolling the subject were not merely introduced to literature, but also were led to be able to evaluate, describe, and analyze literary works.

In order that the students accomplish such objective, the students enrolling the Literary Criticism subject were subjected to the kind of academic writing named Reflective Writing. The students' reflective journals were manifestation of their ideas, thoughts, judgements, and feelings towards literary works. In the reflective journals, the students can also relate their interpretation to other sources or references that support their own ideas.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The research question addressed the issue of reflective writing manifestation in reader-response literary analysis. The data gathered through the research process was qualitative and the unit of analysis was the students' reflective journal portfolio responding to two short stories and a novel. The portfolio contained the students' responses to three given literary works. It included their reviews of the story, personal enjoyment, and connections between personal experiences and the stories. As a pre-activity before writing their responses in their portfolio, the students were given some overview of reader response and reflective writing. Also, they were guided to Gibbs Reflective Circle (1988). In order to help the students to give some ideas of their reflection, the writer gave some prompts that were aimed at giving the students clue in better understanding the literary works. Question prompts given to the students in order to help give them ideas to write included: (1) what were your feelings after reading the short story? (2) did the story make you laugh? Cringe? Smile? Cheer? Explain! (3) do you like the end of the story? why or why not? (4) what makes you wonder in this story? what confuses you? (5) do any characters remind you of friends, family members or classmates? Explain!

### **Short story 1: "The Story of an Hour" by Kate Chopin**

Question prompts were given to the students before they start reading the first short story. Based on the prompts given to the students before they read the literary work, in responding to the first short story the students commonly succeeds in expressing their enjoyment and judgment upon the story. One of the students stated that,

"As I read the story, I felt sorry and proud of Mrs. Mallard because of her strength in facing a life's problems, considering she had a history of heart disease and then suffering who did not get a good treatment from her husband after they were married"

Another student responded,

"Something I have learned from this story was the importance of maintaining the feelings of others, how to treat them well so we did not hurt their heart."

Various kinds of responds were expressed by the students in their reflective essays. Mostly, the students told about how sad they were when reading the short story. not many students talked about some kind of implied

meanings that may be contained in the story. the writer thought it makes sense, since they were not yet be able to think critically; to see what lied beyond the mere story brought up by the author.

Some of the students indeed showed that they had attempted to think critically by questioning some things in the story. This one is an excerpt of the students' reflection:

“Having read this story, I wonder what had Mr. Mallard been done to his wife so that she felt confined? Why did they decide to get married if they could not complete one another? Why Mrs. Mallard did not tell her husband that she was unhappy with him? How did the train company include Brently Mallard's name on the list of “Killed” if at the end he was still alive?”

These questions were one of the evidence that the student actually thought critically. She was trying to have an interaction with the text she was reading. In the writer's opinion, this indicates a good thing, that even though the student might not find answers to her questions, having questions to her reading appears to be a good start for the student to be able to think critically upon a literary work.

For the first short story, the writer can draw a conclusion that through reflective essay, the students had been able to express not merely their personal feelings (like, dislike, sad, unhappy feelings, and so on), but they had also showed that they had a good start to think critically upon literary works.

### **Short Story 2: “Misery” by Anton Chekhov**

When assigning the students to read the second short story, the writer did not give them question prompts to respond to the work. The writer did so to give the students the opportunity to respond to the short story in any ways the wanted. Similar to the responds the first short story, the students' responds to the second short story were various. However, they still lingered in the feeling or personal enjoyment element, instead of examining the implied meanings contained in the story.

A student wrote,

“After reading the story, I felt so unhappy about what happened into Iona's life when the death had separated him from the person he cared for the most, and no one cares at all when he want to tell his sadness”.

This showed that element of feelings still dominated the students' responses for the second short story. However, the writer found that some of the students succeed in relating the story the their own lives. Like the excerpts below showed,

“The character of Iona remind me of my father. He still works to support his family in any condition...”

Another important thing that the writer found in the students' respond was that they started to think critically of the story. This is indicated by the some of the students started questioning why things happened, as in the following excerpts,

“One thing that make me wonder in this story. how come the only one Iona’s daughter, Anisya let him alone without a family? Is she still a child or has she got married? If she was married why didn’t she take her father live with her new family so that Iona don’t need to be a sledge driver in his age now...”

Unfortunately, the questions were not followed by the student’ analysis so that questions merely remained un-analyzed questions, and the implied meanings in the story could not be revealed by her.

Another unsolved questions of the student was revealed in the following extract:

“One thing that make me wonder in this story, how come the only one of Iona daughter, Anisya, let him alone without a family? Is she still a child or has she got married? If she was married, why didn’t she take her father live with her new family so that Iona don’t need to be a sledge-driver in his age now, and I can’t imagine if it happened to my father who has to stay alive without family around him”

In the extract, the student had showed that she had interacted with the text and thought critically upon what had happened to the characters in the story. However, she had not made it to find answers to her questions in mind.

### **Novel : “*Lord of the Flies*” by William Golding**

Since the novel consisted of twelve chapters, the writer assigned the students to divide the reading into four sections. Each section consisted of three chapters; the students must write four reflective essays of the story; each reflective essay recording the students responses of three chapters.

Similar to the second short story, the writer let the students think by themselves of what to write in their reflective essays. The writer did not give them prompts so that they could write as freely as they wanted about the story of the novel.

Generally speaking, after practicing writing reflective essays for the previous short stories, the students responded to the novel quite close as expected by the writer. Besides expressing their feelings and enjoyment, the students were also able to express their critical thinking in their reflective essays. One example of their responses was,

“The story from chapter 4 to chapter 6 left me felt hesitate and a bit furious. ...” the feelings were not only sad or unhappy, but they also felt other kinds of feeling (furious). The writer thinks this is a good sign that the students were successful in getting themselves involved in the story.

### **DISCUSSION**

The present study was carried out by assigning three literary works to the students taking the Literary Criticism subject. It was aimed at exploring the manifestation of reflective writing in the students’ Reader-response of literary analysis of the given literary works. The writer wanted to see how the students gave responses to the literary works.



In answering the research question “How is reflective writing manifested in the students’ Reader Response of literary analysis?”, the present study revealed some findings. Firstly, Reader-response prompts were helpful in giving aids to the students that they give the students idea how to write down their ideas and thoughts in minds. However, as the second finding, most students tend to keep their focus on the feeling section. Some of them were proven to be more critical by questioning things happened in the stories, yet they still had no idea how to analyze and evaluate the questions they had. The last finding, the writer noticed that none of the students relate their reflective essays to relevant literature to support their opinion. The writer considered that this occurred due to their lack of knowledge and practice of critical thinking and critical writing. This is a hard work for the writer as the practitioner of literary teaching to the EFL students to encourage the students not to be hesitated to read a lot so that they can improve their knowledge and make it basic to reflective writing of literary works.

#### **Suggestion for further research**

The present study was aimed at finding out how reflective writing is manifested in the students’ Reader Response of literary analysis. By presenting some extracts from the participant students’ works of reflection, the writer investigated how the students manifest their interaction as the reader with the text, as suggested by Rosenblatt, in the reflection or reflective journal. The study focused on the students’ manifestation of reflective writing in literary analysis. In the extracts, some grammatical errors were inevitably noted. The writer suggests that there are further research that focus not only on how the students manifest the reflective writing in literary analysis, but also on the proper use of grammar when the students are assigned to make reflections of literary works.

## REFERENCES

- Anonymous Authors. (2012). *From Writing about Readers: Applying Reader-response Theory*.
- Collie, J. and S. Slater. (1990): *Literature in the Language Classroom: A Resource Book of Ideas and Activities*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Frankael. J.R., Wallen. N.E., Hyun. H.H., (2012). *How to Design and Evaluate Research in Education. Eight Edition*. McGraw Hill. NY.
- Garzon, E. & Pena, H.C,. (2015). Applying the Reader-Response Theory to Literary Texts in EFL-Pre-Service Teachers' Initial Education. *English Language Teaching*; Vol. 8, No. 8; 2015.
- Gibbs, G. (1988). *Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods*. Oxford: Oxford Further Education Unit
- Harfitt, G. & Chu, B. (2011). Actualizing Reader-Response Theory on L2 Teacher Training Programs. *TESL Canada Journal* Vol. 29. No.1
- Herlina, N. (2016). Teaching literature through poetry: A shifting reading orientation from efferent to aesthetic. *EduLite: Journal of English Education, Literature, and Culture*. Vol.1, No. 2. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.30659/e.1.2.225-238>.
- Hubbs, D., Brand, C.F., (2010). Learning from the Inside Out: A Method for analyzing Reflective Journals in the College Classroom. *Journal of Experiential Education*. vol.33 no 1.
- Iskhak. (2015). The Application of Reader-response Theory in Enhancing Student Teachers' Affective and Linguistic Growth: A Classroom Action Research in EFL Teacher Education in Indonesia. *The English Teacher*, XLIV(2), 43-55.
- Khatib, M. (2011). Literature in EFL/ESL Classroom. *English Language Teaching* Vol. 4, No. 1
- Lazar, Gilian. (1993). *Literature and Language Teaching*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.
- Learning and Information Services (2012) *Guide to reflective writing* [online]. Wolverhampton: University of Wolverhampton
- Rosenblatt, L. (1988). *Writing and Reading the Transactional Theory*. The National Institute of Education. Wahington DC.
- Ross, N. (2011). *Reflective Writing: An Approach to Developing Critical Thinking & Proficient Writing*. United States Military Academy. West Point NY.